

THE EXCELLENCE OF THE OBJECTIVE IN CELEBRATING THE BIRTHDAY OF THE NOBLE PROPHET (S.A.W) *by Imam Jalaluddin al-Suyuti (R.A)*

Allah in the Name of, Most Beneficent, Most Merciful

PREFACE

'Abd al-Rahman ibn Abu Bakr ibn Muhammad ibn Sabiq al-Din, Jalaluddin al-Suyuti (radi Allahu anhu) was born in 849 A.H./1445. He was a Shafi'i mujtahid Imam, Mufassir, Sufi, Muhammadith - hadith master (Hafiz), and historian, a prolific writer who authored books in virtually every Islamic science. He was raised as an orphan in Cairo and memorized the Holy Quran at 8. Amongst his teachers were Siraj al-Din Bulqini, Sharaf al-Din al-Munawi, Taqi al-Din al-Shamani. He travelled to gain Sacred Knowledge to Damascus, the Hijaz, Yemen, India, Morocco, and the lands south of Morocco, as well as centres of learning in Egypt such as Malalla, Dumyat and Fayyum.

In this book, the great scholar he has shed light on the historical and legal status of the Meelad Shareef in his own characteristic scholarly style. Before forming any opinion on the status of this booklet in imparting knowledge and benefit, first of all consider the illustrious personality of the author. The highly acclaimed "Tafsir al-Jalalain" which he co-authored is still a prescribed textbook in religious institutions and Muslims

of all shades of opinion study and teach it, and praise Imam al-Suyuti for this work. Apart from this, his book on Usul al-Tafsir called "al-Itqan fi Ulum al-Quran" became an indispensable source of reference for all later works on the subject. "Al-Badr al-Manshur", his Tafsir of the Holy Quran is referred to as an exemplary Tafsir. On the characteristics and miracles of the Noble Prophet (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam), his work entitled "al-Kasa'is al-Kubra" has the distinction of being the foremost on this topic and excerpts from it are to be found in the works on Sirah by eminent Imams and Ulama.

It is thus obvious that when such a great religious luminary takes up his pen to write on the Meelad Shareef, i.e. celebrating the Birthday of the Noble Prophet (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam), the result will be of a unique status and its every word will be a summary of his vast knowledge of Tafsir, Hadith, Fiqh, Usul and history. Thus it would form the conclusive verdict of this subject.

Imam Jalaluddin al-Suyuti (radi Allahu anhu) passed away in Cairo at 60 years of age in 911A.H./1505.

PRAISE BE TO ALLAH AND PEACE ON HIS CHOSEN SERVANTS

The question under consideration is what is the verdict of the Shari'ah on celebrating the Holy Birthday of the Noble Prophet (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam) in the month of Rabi-ul-Awwal. From the point of view of the Shari'ah, is this a

praiseworthy action or a blameworthy one? And do those who arrange such a celebration receive blessings or not?

THE OCCASION OF HAPPINESS

The reply to this question is that in my view the Meelad Shareef, Celebration of the Birthday of the Noble Prophet (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam) is in fact such an occasion of happiness on which people assemble and recite the Holy Quran to the extent that is easy. Then they relate the prophecies concerning the appearance of the Noble Prophet (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam) that have been transmitted in Ahadith and Athar, and the miraculous events and signs that took place on his birth. Then food is set before them and according to their desire they partake thereof to satisfaction. This festival of celebrating the birthday of the Noble Prophet (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam), is a Bid'ah Hasanah (a good innovation) and those arranging it will get blessings, since in such a celebration is found the expression of joy and happiness at the greatness and eminence of the Noble Prophet (salall laahu alaihi wasallam) at his birth.

HISTORY OF THE MEELAD SHAREEF

The beginning of the celebration of the Meelad Shareef in its present form lies with the ruler of Irbil, Sultan Muzaffar whose full name is Abu Said Kukabri Ibn Zain al-Din Ali Ibn Baktagin, who is counted among the great Sultans and generous leaders. He was responsible for many other noble works as well.

Among the many monuments set up by him was the Jami Muzaffari, which he had constructed near Mount Tasiyun.

Ibn Kathir (radi Allahu anhu) writes about Sultan Muzaffar as follows: "Sultan Muzaffar used to arrange the celebration of the Meelad Shareef with due honour, glory, dignity and grandeur. In this connection, he used to organise a magnificent festival. He was a pure-hearted, brave and wise Alim and a just ruler. May Allah shower His Mercy on him and grant him an exalted status. Sheikh Abu al-Khattab Ibn Dhiyah also wrote a book for him on the Meelad Shareef entitled 'al-Tanwir fi Mawlid al-Bashir al-Nadhir' (Enlightenment on the Birthday of the Bearer of Good News, the Warner). For this book Sultan Muzaffar awarded him a gift of one thousand dinars. Sultan Muzaffar remained the ruler until his death, which occurred in 630 A.H. in the city of 'Akka when he had the Europeans under seige. In short he was a man of piety and noble disposition".

Sibt Ibn al-Jauzi (radi Allahu anhu) wrote in "Mir'at al-Zaman" that one participant in the Meelad Shareef organised by Sultan Muzaffar states that on the royal table-spread were laid out five hundred prepared goats, ten thousand chickens, one hundred thousand earthen tumblers and thirty thousand baskets of sweet fruits. He further writes that eminent pious Ulama and illustrious Sufis used to attend the Meelad Shareef ceremony held by the Sultan, who used to honour them with robes of distinction and royal favour. For the Sufis there used to be a Mahfil-e-Sama from Zuhr until Fajr, in which the Sultan himself

used to participate and derive ecstasy there-from together with the Sufis. Every year his expenditure on the Meelad Shareef amounted to three hundred thousand dinars. For those coming from outside (the city) he had a special guest house commissioned, where people from all walks of life used to come from different places and without any discrimination of status. The expenditure of that guest house used to be one hundred thousand dinars annually.

Similarly, he used to spend two hundred thousand dinars annually to ransom Muslim prisoners-of-war from the Europeans. Also for the maintenance of the two Harams and for providing water along the routes in Hijaz (for pilgrims), he used to spend three thousand dinars annually. These are in addition to the Sadaqat and charity that used to be given secretly. His wife, Rabi'ah Khatoon Bint Ayyub, the sister of Sultan Nasir Salahuddin narrates that her husband used to wear a garment (Qamis) of coarse cotton costing no more than five dirhams. She says that she once rebuked him for this, upon which he replied that his wearing a five-dirham garment and spending the rest of the money in charity is far better than wearing a costly garment and giving a poor or indigent person mere good wishes.

THE FIRST BOOK ON THE MEELAD SHAREEF

Ibn Khallikan wrote in the biographical sketch of Hafiz Abu al-Khattab Ibn Dihyah: "He was one of the pious Ulama and famous scholars. He travelled from Morocco to Syria and Iraq. In the year 654 A.H. he passed through the area of Irbil,

where he saw that its ruler, the eminent Sultan Muzaffar al-Din Ibn Zainal-Din arranged for celebrating the Birthday of the Prophet. So he wrote the book 'Kitab al-Tanwir fi Mawlid al-Bashir al-Nadhir' for the Sultan and himself read it out to him. I myself heard the book read out in six sittings at the Sultan's place in 625 A.H."

AL-FAKIHANI'S ESSAY REJECTING THE MEELAD SHAREEF

Sheikh Tajuddin Umar Ibn Ali al-Khumi al-Iskandari, well known as al-Fakihani, has claimed that the Meelad Shareef is a reprehensible Bid'ah (innovation). In this regard, he wrote an essay entitled "al-Mawrid fi-l-Kalam ala-l-Mawlid" (The origin in Discussion about the Birthday of the Prophet).

REFUTATION OF THE FOREGOING ESSAY

Now consider may discussion on what al-Fakihani has said in this brief essay.

In connection with this statement that he could not find any basis for the Meelad Shareef in the Quran and the Sunnah, our submission is that the negation of the knowledge of a thing does not necessarily imply the negation of the existence of that thing (i.e. someone not having knowledge of a thing does not necessarily mean that that thing does not in reality exist). The Imam of the Huffaz, Abdul Fadl Ahmad Ibn Hajar (radi Allahu anhu) has extracted a basis for the Meelad Shareef from the

Sunnah. One more basis I have extracted, which will be mentioned later.

Al-Fakihani has stated that the Meelad Shareef is an innovation invented by useless and idle people, who are slaves of their stomachs and on whom the lower desires of the Nafs predominate. Further, having explained the different kinds of rules he stated that it is neither Wajib, nor Mandub, since neither did the Shari'ah demand it nor did the Sahabah, the Tabi'un and the Ulama of the early generations celebrate it. In this connection we say, as stated earlier, that it was a just Sultan who was an Alim who started the Meelad Shareef with the objective of obtaining nearness to Allah. There were many Ulama and pious people with him, yet none of them deemed it reprehensible. On the contrary, Ibn Dihyah (such an eminent Alim of that time) liked the celebration of the Meelad Shareef, and wrote a book for the Sultan on this subject (as mentioned earlier). These were all Ulama of the earlier generations who liked the Meelad Shareef, who supported and confirmed it and did not criticise or refute it. (This is itself a self-evident proof that al-Fakihani's allegations are wrong).

Then there remains his statement that the Meelad Shareef is not even Mandub in reality, which the Shari'ah has demanded. In this regard our submission is that the demand of the Shari'ah is known sometimes through a Nass (an explicit textual statement in the Quran or in the Hadith literature) and sometimes through Qiyas (analogical deduction). For the Meelad Shareef, although

no Nass is to be found, yet from those two bases in the Sunnah which are mentioned further on, Qiyas can definitely be made (i.e., when Qiyas is applied on those two bases the commendability – being Mandub – of the Meelad Shareef can be realised).

DIFFERENT CATEGORIES OF BID'AH (INNOVATION)

His statement that the Meelad Shareef can also not be Mubah because the Ijma' of the followers of Islam is that anything that is a Bid'ah (innovation) in religion cannot be Mubah, is one that is not accepted. This is because Bid'ah (innovations) are not classified only as Haraam or Makruh, but they can also be Mubah as well as Mandub or Wajib.

Imam al-Nawawi (radi Allahu anhu) says in "Tahdhib al-Asma wal Lugat": "Bid'ah in the Shari'ah is the invention of that which was not there in the period of the Messenger of Allah, and it is divided into two categories, Hasanah (or good) and Qabihah (or evil)."

Shaikh Izzuddin Ibn Abd al-Salaam (radi Allahu anhu) writes in "al-Qawa'id": "Bid'ah is divided into Wajib, Haraam, Mandub, Makruh and Mubah. And the way to know to which category it belongs is to examine it together with the laws of Shari'ah. If it falls with those laws that deal with what is Wajib, then it is Wajib; if with those laws that deal with what is Haraam, then it is Haraam; if with the laws dealing with what is Mandub, then Mandub; if the laws dealing with what is Makruh,

then Makruh; if with the laws dealing with what is Mubah, then Mubah".

After this he went on to give examples of the five kinds of Bid'ah and wrote: "As for Bid'ah that is Mandub, its examples are the setting up of inns and educational institutions and very good action which was not there in the first age. Among the latter are Tarawih, discussion on the intricacies of Tasawwuf and debates. And among these is the convening of assemblies for deduction of laws in connection with problems providing that the motive thereof is to seek the pleasure of Allah Ta'ala".

Al-Baihaqi (radi Allahu anhu) in "Manaqib al-Shafi'i" has transmitted with his isnad (chain of narrators) from Imam al-Shafi'i (radi Allahu anhu) himself, that he said: "The new things that are brought about are of two kinds. One kind is that which is brought about, inconsistent with something in the Quran or the Sunnah or with some Athar or some Ijma'. This is the category of Bid'ah Dalalah (heretic innovation). The second kind is that which is brought about from good things which are not inconsistent with any of the above".

Umar (radi Allahu anhu) did say about standing in prayer in the month of Ramadaan, "What a good Bid'ah this is!" meaning that this is a new thing which was not there before and being a new thing it does not contradict anything that went before.

THE BID'AH THAT IS MANDUB

This refutes al-Fakihani's statement that the Meelad Shareef cannot also be Mubah. But on the contrary it is a Bid'ah that is Makruh. This is because the Meelad Shareef is of that category of new matters which involve no inconsistency with anything in the Quran or the Sunnah, or with any Athar or Ijma'. Thus, this is not blameworthy (i.e. from the point of view of the Shari'ah, there is no evil in it), as in the statement of Imam al-Shafi'i (radi Allahu anhu) and it is a good action which, even though (in its present form) was not done in the first age, was brought about afterwards.

The invitation to partake of food and drink in which there is no sin, is an act of goodness for sure. Therefore, in connection with the Meelad Shareef, that assembly in which someone, out of his lawfully earned wealth, invites his family, relatives and friends to partake of food and drink in which there is no action against the Shari'ah – that assembly is a Bid'ah (innovation) that is Mandub (commendable), as is clear from the above quoted statements of Shaikh Izzuddin Ibn Abd al-Salam (radi Allahu anhu).

HARAAM AND MAKRUH THINGS

In connection with the second manner al-Fakihani has described and criticised, his criticism is in itself correct. There is no doubt that the assembly (mahfil) is Haraam where men, women, youths and little boys are freely mixed, and which there

is dancing and music, with musical instruments in busy use, or where women assemble separately and sing in raised voices. But this does not mean that to arrange for the Meelad Shareef has been deemed Haraam. On the contrary, in the above instances the reason for their being Haraam is not assembling to celebrate the Meelad Shareef but is due to those things which are Haraam in the Shari'ah and have become mixed with the blessed assembly. (And if these things are not indulged in, then the Meelad Shareef would be as assembly for remembering Muhammad Mustafa - sallal laahu alaihi wasallam - and would thus be full of goodness and blessings).

Furthermore, if these kinds of actions were to take place say, in the assembly for Salat-ul-Jumu'ah, then it is evident that would be a reprehensible step and an evil matter. However from this the criticism of the original assembly for Salat-ul-Jumu'ah does not necessarily ensue. It has been seen that some of these kinds of actions also take place on the nights of Ramadaan Shareef, when people assemble for Salatut-Tarawih. Now on the basis of those actions can one conceivably criticise assembling for Salatut-Tarawih? Definitely not! However, we will say that the original assembly for Salatut-Tarawih is Sunnah and an act of virtue and Ibadah, but that those above mentioned actions, which have become mixed with it, are evil and repulsive.

Similarly, we say in connection with the celebration of the Meelad Shareef that the assembly is itself Mandub (commendable) and an act of virtue, but the above mentioned

kinds of other actions, which have become mixed with it, are blameworthy and unlawful.

REFUTATION OF THE FINAL OBJECTION

In conclusion, al-Fakihani stated that Rabi-ul-Awwal is the month not only of the birth of the Noble Prophet (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam), but also of his demise. Therefore, instead of grief and sorrow, exhibiting joy and happiness is neither better nor suitable. In reply to this, first of all we submit that the birth of the Noble Prophet (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam) is the greatest favour of Allah granted to us, and that his death is the greatest affliction for us. However, the Shari'ah has encouraged us to show our gratitude for favours has taught us to observe patient, perseverance, silence and calm in the face of afflictions. The Shari'ah has ordered us to offer the Aqiqah on the birth of a child, which is an expression of gratitude and happiness on the birth of that child. But the Shari'ah has not ordered us to sacrifice any animal on the death of someone, nor to do any such action. On the contrary, it has prohibited wailing and lamentation. Thus the laws of the Shari'ah indicate that to exhibit happiness in this holy month in connection with the birth of the Noble Prophet (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam), is better than showing grief at his demise.

Ibn Rajab (radi Allahu anhu) in his "Kitab al-Lata'if" wrote criticising the Rawafid (A Shia sect) that because of the martyrdom of Imam Husain (radi Allahu anhu) they have made Ashura (the 10th of Muharram) a day of mourning, whereas

Allah and His Messenger (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam), have prohibited taking the days of affliction on the Prophets and the days of their deaths (alaihimus-salaam) as days of mourning. What then is the justification for taking days of mourning for those who are not prophets?

STAND-POINT OF IBN AL-HAJ

Imam Abu Abdullah Ibn al-Haj (radi Allahu anhu) has discussed the subject of the Meelad Shareef with great maturity and insight in his book "al-Madkhal". To sum up his discussion, he has praised celebrating the Meelad Shareef with joy and happiness and exhibiting gratitude to Allah, therefor. And he has criticised those Haraam and prohibited things which have been included in it. Here, I quote his discussion section-wise.

SOMETHING ABOUT THE MEELAD

"From among those innovations which those people have brought about, thinking that thereby they are engaging in a great act of Ibadah and participating in religious ceremonies (to celebrate the remembrance of some great event) is this that in the month of Rabi-ul-Awwal they celebrate the Meelad, which celebration is constituted of many innovations and unlawful things. Among these are the participants sing songs and Ghazals while at the same time using musical instruments – drums, flutes, fiddles, etc. – and in this connection do many other evil actions which are customarily done mainly at those times which Allah Ta'ala has endowed with excellence and greatness (e.g.

Eid and other occasions) and which are innovations wholly and totally, and are prohibited. There is no doubt that this kind of Sama, if it takes place on other nights apart from this, even then it would not be permissible. What then is the justification for holding such a Sama in this holy month, which Allah Almighty the Most Excellent has endowed with excellence and blessings in that His Beloved was born therein – such a Sama in which musical instruments are used? What relation can such a Sama have to this holy and blessed month, in which Allah (Exalted is His Majesty) granted us the great Ihsan of the auspicious birth of the Noble Prophet, the leader of those who are first and those who are last, (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam)?

"Therefore, it is Wajib that special gratitude to Allah Ta'ala should be expressed in this month and as much Ibadah and charity should be done as is possible, since He has bestowed on us this very great favour (that He caused the birth therein) of His beloved (servant) (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam). Even though the Noble Prophet (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam) did not engage in more Ibadah in this month as compared with other months (nor did he command us to do so), yet in reality, this was due to his mercy and kindness to his Ummah, and also to create ease and mildness for them. This is why at times the Noble Prophet would leave off doing an action, lest it should become compulsory on his Ummah. This is the result of his mercy on us".

MERITS OF THE DAY OF THE MEELAD AND OF THE NOBLE PROPHET (SALLAL LAAHU ALAIHI WASALLAM)

"Nevertheless, the Noble Prophet has indicated the excellence of this great month in reply to a questioner. When he questioner wanted to find out about fasting on Mondays, the Noble Prophet (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam) replied: 'That is the day on which I was born'. (al-Hadith)

"Since the excellence of this day (i.e. Monday) implies the excellence of this month (i.e. Rabi-ul-Awwal) in which the Noble Prophet graced this world, then it is our duty to give this month its due respect and sanctity, and we should understand it to be very excellent just as Allah Ta'ala has deemed other blessed months to be very excellent. In this connection the Noble Prophet is reported to have said: 'I am the leader of the children of Adam and there is no pride (in this)'. 'Adam and all other (Prophets alaihimus-salaam) will be under my flag (on the Day of Judgement)'.

"The merits and excellence of times and places are a result of those forms of Ibadah which are carried out therein, and by which Allah Ta'ala has specially favoured them. When it is known that times and places do not in themselves contain any honour and greatness accrues on account of those characteristics and distinctions (with which they have been granted exaltation), then reflect on this greatest favour of Allah Ta'ala, with which He has distinguished and ear-marked this blessed month, Rabi-

ul-Awwal Shareef and the day, Monday. Do you not see that fasting on Mondays has great merit because the Noble Prophet (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam) was born on a Monday?

"For this reason it is of the utmost appropriateness (and it behoves us to do so) that when this holy month comes, it should be treated with the exaltation, honour, esteem and respect it deserves. The example of the Noble Prophet (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam) should be followed in that in times endowed with special distinction, he himself used to perform the maximum possible acts of virtue and of charity, and he used to make special arrangements thereof. Have you not seen the following statement of Hazrat Ibn Abbas? 'The Messenger of Allah was the most generous of men and his generosity was the utmost in Ramadan'".

WHY IS RESPECT FOR RABI-UL-AWWAL ESSENTIAL? (AND IN THIS CONNECTION THE REMOVAL OF A MISGIVING)

"For this reason, just as the Noble Prophet honoured those times endowed with distinction, we carry out this very duty in accordance with our capacity, in the month of Rabi-ul-Awwal Shareef. If it be said that what the Noble Prophet (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam) took upon himself in times of special distinction is known, but what he undertook in other months he did not do so in this month (i.e. Rabi-ul-Awwal Shareef) – then the answer is that it is well-known that the Noble Prophet (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam) had this noble trait of wanting ease and

relief for his Ummah, especially in those things concerning himself. Do you not see that the Noble Prophet, the leader of the world, (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam) declared Madinah Munawwarah as sacred territory (Haram) just as Hazrat Ibrahim (alaihis-salaam) has declared Makkah Mukarramah to be, yet he did not fix any punishment for hunting, cutting down any tree, etc. in Madinah? – do you not see that he did this out of desiring ease and relief for his Ummah and out of mercy on them?

"As it were, the Noble Prophet (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam) used to consider what things concerned his own self, and even though those things in themselves are of great merit, yet through desiring ease and relief for his Ummah, he used to abstain from them. The honouring of Rabi-ul-Awwal Shareef is of this category, that in it the maximum possible acts of virtue and charity should be done and he who cannot do so (i.e. for any reason is unable to perform these acts), at least he should abstain from all Haraam and Makruh things in this holy month, out of respect for it. Even though the abstention from all Haraam and Makruh things is required in other months as well, yet this month deserves the greatest respect. He should do so just as in Ramadan al-Mubarak and other sacred months, he remains careful to the utmost, abstains from misdeeds in religion and keeps away from other unsuitable things".

CRITICISM BY IBN AL-HAJ

"However, at the present time some people are acting contrary to this. When this blessed month comes they busy

themselves with amusement and sport, using musical instruments. However, regretful it is that they make music and merriment and then entertain the assertion that they are showing respect for this blessed month! Leave aside the fact that they begin such Meelad celebrations with the recitation of the Holy Quran. They then, for the sensual delight of the Nafs, take resort to those who are expert at the art of creating restlessness and excitement in the emotions – which in itself contains many causes of corruption and destruction.

"Yet they do not content themselves with that alone – but some of them add an even more dangerous thing in that the singer is young, handsome, mellow-voiced, well-attired and of a very pleasing appearance. He sings Ghazals, at the same time with crescendo and diminuendo in voice and ascent and descent in movements. Thus, he puts the audience, men and women into temptation. The result is that the two sides become prey to temptation and other many evils take the root. In some extreme cases, the husband-wife relationship is destroyed and it even reaches the extent of separation between them at times. Thus, the period of destruction and ruin begins, in which a settled and complete home is destroyed and peace of mind and heart ruined. These evils are the result of that kind of Meelad celebration in which there is also a session of Sama".

"Yes, if the Meelad Shareef is free from those evils (and that kind of Sama) – only food is prepared and in that ones Niyyah (intention) is of celebrating the Meelad and Muslim

brethren are invited and in which those matters contrary to the Shari'ah and those blameworthy matters described above are abstained from – then it is an innovation merely on account of one's Niyyah (intention) because this is an accretion in the religion. Also the pious predecessors have not done it, and it is evident that it is better than more appropriate to follow the predecessors from none of whom has this been transmitted, nor has it been said of any of them that they made the Niyyah (intention) of celebrating the Meelad. We are their followers and are obligated to observe the same precepts as they were. (Thus, we should do only that which they did)".

GIST OF CRITICISM

The gist of the above quoted writing of Ibn al-Haj (radi Allahu anhu) is that he has not criticised the Meelad Shareef. On the contrary, he has criticised those things which are Haraam and Makruh in the Shari'ah. From the opening section it is clear that this holy month should be accorded a special status and it should be honoured and respected. The maximum possible acts of virtue should be done therein. One should try to surpass one's limits in doing acts of Ibadah, of charity and other virtuous acts. This is the method of celebrating the Meelad Shareef which he has deemed praiseworthy and commendable, because in that there is nothing but the recitation of the Holy Quran and an invitation to partake of food and drink – and these are the acts of goodness, meriting reward.

As far as his statement goes that this is an innovation – either it is in clear contradiction to what he said earlier (when Ibn al-Haj himself stressed honouring the month of Rabi-ul-Awwal), or it means that it is a good innovation (Bid'ah Hasanah) the elucidation of which was given earlier, or it means that the Meelad Shareef is a virtuous and praiseworthy act, and the innovation is the Niyyah (intention) of the Meelad, as he has suggested in his statement of his, then it will be an innovation merely on his account of his Niyyah (intention).

AN ACADEMIC EXAMINATION OF THIS

There remains the statement of Ibn al-Haj (radi Allahu anhu) that it has not been transmitted that any of the predecessors made the Niyyah (intention) of celebrating the Meelad. From this it is clear that he considered the Niyyah of celebrating the Meelad to be Makruh and that he did not deem the preparation of food and inviting Muslim brethren to partake thereof as Makruh (i.e. he also views the preparation of food and inviting Muslim brethren as not being Makruh). If this is examined closely, then it seems that this statement of his is not consistent with his earlier statements. This is due to the fact that he first taught the showing of gratitude to Allah Ta'ala in Rabi-ul-Awwal Shareef, and the engaging in the maximum acts of Ibadah and of charity and other virtuous acts therein since he caused His Beloved (Servant), (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam) to be born in this holy month. The Niyyah (intention) of celebrating the Meelad Shareef means only this. Then how can

something be criticised after doing it has been stressed? Abstract virtue, acts of Ibadah, of charity, etc. and other acts of goodness cannot be conceived of without a Niyyah (intention). And even it could be considered, then it couldn't be deemed Ibadah, nor can it earn any reward. This is because no action without an intention is (worthy of acceptance). And the Niyyah (intention) to celebrate the Meelad Shareef means only to demonstrate gratitude to Allah Ta'ala on the auspicious birth of the Noble Prophet (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam) in Rabi-ul-Awwal. The intention of celebrating the Meelad Shareef means only this, and there is no doubt that this intention is commendable (i.e. it is a virtuous intention). Ponder on this well (and impress it on the mind well).

EXTRA-ORDINARY FORM OF THE MEELAD

After this Ibn al-Haj wrote: "There are some people who do not celebrate the Meelad solely for the purpose of demonstrating honour and respect. On the contrary, someone has some money in the possession of various people which he had given them on different occasions and ceremonies and now he wants to repossess this money and is shy to ask for it. Therefore, he makes arrangement for the Meelad which becomes the cause for the recovery of his wealth which was in the hands of people.

"In this many types of corruption are found. One is that hypocrisy is found there – in his heart the opposite of what he outwardly shows is present. Outwardly he shows that he is celebrating the Meelad because he wants to gain benefits in the

Hereafter, however in his heart that he should recover his money dispersed in the hands of people.

"Some are such that they celebrate the Meelad in order to collect money or so that people may praise them (saying for example, 'Well done, brother!' or 'What good work you have done!') and join them to work (so that it may be evident from this how many people are with them). In these forms as well as the acts of corruption and destruction are not hidden".

REAL REASON FOR ABOMINABLENESS

The criticism by Ibn al-Haj (radi Allahu anhu) is also of that kind which has already been examined above. The blameworthy or evil aspect in it is based on the absence of pure Niyyah (intention), and not that in the Meelad Shareef itself there is to be found any evil or blameworthy aspect.

VIEWPOINTS OF SHAIKH AL-ISLAM IBN HAJAR

Shaikh al-Islam Abdul Fadl Ahmad Ibn Hajar (the Hafiz of the Age) (radi Allahu anhu) was asked about the Meelad Shareef. His reply was that the Meelad Shareef is, in fact, an innovation, which was not transmitted from any pious predecessor in the first three centuries. Nevertheless, both acts of virtue as well as acts of abomination are to be found in it (i.e. sometimes acts of virtue are found therein and sometimes acts of abomination). If in the Meelad Shareef only acts of virtue are done and acts of abomination are abstained from, then the

Meelad Shareef is a Bid'ah Hasanah (a good innovation), otherwise not.

BASIS OF THE MEELAD SHAREEF

He has said that he found a strong basis for the Meelad Shareef in "Sahih al-Bukhari" and "Sahih Muslim". It is that when the Noble Prophet (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam) migrated to Madinah, he saw the Jews fasting on Ashura (i.e. the 10th of Muharram). He enquired from them as to reason for this. They told him that Ashura is that day on which Allah Ta'ala has caused Pharaoh to drown, and granted Musa (alaihis-salaam) deliverance from him, and that they (the Jews) therefore fast (on that day) out of gratitude to Allah Ta'ala.

From this the proof is obtained of showing gratitude to Allah, and in that connection to do any virtuous act and to observe it annually as a means of recollection for any special day on which Allah Ta'ala has bestowed any favour or removed any calamity. Gratitude to Allah Ta'ala is expressed through different kinds of Ibadah – prostration and standing in prayer, charity and the recitation of the Holy Quran. And what greater favour of Allah Ta'ala can there be than the appearance of the Prophet of Mercy (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam) on this day (i.e. 12th Rabi-ul-Awwal)? Therefore, this day should be specially observed so that consistency with the event concerning Hazrat Musa (alaihis-salaam) on the day of Ashura, be attained.

Some people do not limit it and celebrate the Meelad Shareef on any day of Rabi-ul-Awwal. Nay, some have extended it even more and increased the period to the whole year. According to the latter, the Meelad Shareef can be celebrated on any day of the year. The objective here is the same (i.e. to rejoice at and celebrate the Holy birth of the Noble Prophet - sallal laahu alaihi wasallam).

This discussion has been in connection with the basis of the Meelad Shareef.

ITS BETTER TO REFRAIN FROM WHAT IS NOT MOST PREFERABLE

As far as those actions are concerned which are done in the Meelad Shareef it needs that one content oneself with only such actions through which gratitude through Allah Ta'ala is demonstrated in a proper manner. For example, the above-mentioned matters – recitation of the Holy Quran, invitation to partake of food, acts of charity, reciting verses in praise of the Leader of the two worlds (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam) and such verses through which hearts are moved towards acts of Ibadah and piety and through which there is motivation for bringing about acts of virtue and for working for the Hereafter.

Concerning those things belonging to the category of Sama and amusement and song ... and which happen to be within the sphere of permissibility and through which joy is expressed on that day – if such things are done there is no evil therein. And

those things belonging to the categories of Haraam and Makruh they should be guarded against. Similarly, those things which are inconsistent with what is Awla (most preferable) and which are not appropriate such things should be abandoned.

ANOTHER BASIS FOR THE MEELAD SHAREEF

I submit that I have also found another basis for the Meelad Shareef in the Hadith Shareef (literature). It is that al-Baihaqi transmits from Hazrat Anas (radi Allahu anhuma) that the Noble Prophet (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam) performed his own Aqiqa in the period after the proclamation of Prophethood. This was in spite of the fact the his grandfather, Hazrat Abdul Muttalib (radi Allahu anhu), had already performed the Aqiqa on the seventh day after the birth, and Aqiqa is done only once and is not done a second time.

From this it is understood that the Noble Prophet (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam) did this to show his gratitude to Allah Ta'ala for causing him to be born, having made him "the mercy unto all the worlds". The objective was also to create a precedent in the Shari'ah for the Ummah – just as the Noble Prophet himself (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam) used to recite Darud Shareef on his own self in order to create a principal in the Shari'ah for that act of showing honour and esteem to him. Therefore, it is commendable (Mustahab) that we arrange for the Meelad Shareef to show our gratitude (to Allah Ta'ala) for the birth of the Noble Prophet (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam), in which the invitation to food and drink is there and other similar

acts of virtue are done and which occasion is celebrated with happiness.

IBN AL-JAZARI'S FAITH-ENKINDLING PROOF

I came across the book of the Imam of Qurra Shams al-Din Ibn al-Jazari (radi Allahu anhu) entitled "Urf al-Ta'arif bil Mawlid al-Sharif" in which he writes that after the death of Abu Lahab someone saw him in a dream and enquired from him as to his condition. He said that punishment is being meted out. However, on the night of Monday, there is some relaxation in his punishment and he manages to suck some water from his finger (so saying, he indicated the finger) because it was through a gesture of that finger that he set his female slave Thuwaibah free when she conveyed to him the good news of the birth of the Noble Prophet (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam) and that she had the privilege of suckling him. Consider! If this Abu Lahab, a Kafir whose censure has come in the Holy Quran also – if he has been rewarded for his expression of the joy at the birth of the Noble Prophet (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam), what will be the condition of that Muslim, the sincere upholder of Tawhid from his Ummah who express joy at the birth of the Noble Prophet (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam) and spends whatsoever is possible for him, out of love for the Noble Prophet (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam)? By my life! His reward will be that Allah the most Noble, out of his comprehensive Grace will place him in the gardens of Bliss.

AL-DIMASHQI'S SOUL-ENRICHING NAATH ON THE MEELAD

Hafiz Shams al-Din Ibn Nasir al-Din al-Dimashqi (radi Allahu anhu) has written in his book "Mawrid al-Sadi fi Mawlid al-Hadi": "It is established in Sahih Ahadith that punishment is lessened for Abu Lahab every Monday because he said Thuwaibah free out of joy and happiness at the birth of the Noble Prophet (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam). After this he wrote the following lines of poetry:

"When this is a Kafir and his censure has come (in the Quran)

Perish his hands in the fire of Hell forever

It has been narrated that always on a Monday

(His punishment) is lessened because of his happiness at (the birth of) Ahmad

What is the view then about the servant (of Allah) who spent his whole life

Being happy at (the birth of) Ahmad and died an upholder of Tawhid?"

PRACTICE OF A SHEIKH OF A TARIQAH

Kamal Adfiri states in "al-Tali al-Sa'id" that his reliable and trustworthy friend Nasir al-Din Mahmud Ibn al-'Imad related that Abu al-Tayyib Muhammad Ibn Ibrahim al-Sibt al-Maliki, a resident of Tus and one of the pious Ulama, used to pass by the

Madrassah on the birthday of the Noble Prophet (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam) and say, "O Jurist! Today is the day of Eid. Give the students a holiday and send them home". Thus they used to give them a holiday and send them home.

This is evidence of his confirmation and absence of rejection. This gentleman was a famous Jurist of the Maliki School of Law, who had a command over many branches of knowledge and was a God-conscious and pious elder. Abu Hayyan and others have transmitted narrations from him. He passed away in the year 695 A.H.

CONCLUSION

Ibn al-Haj has written that if it is questioned as to wisdom in the birth of the Noble Prophet (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam) being in the month of Rabi-ul-Awwal and on Monday not in the month of Ramadaan al-Sharif, which is the month of the sending down of the Quran and in which Lailatul-Qadr is found, nor in any of the sacred months nor on the fifteenth of Shabaan al-Mu'azzam, nor on Friday, nor on the night of Friday – then the reply can be given from four angles:

- (1) It has been transmitted in Hadith literature that Allah Ta'ala created the trees on a Monday. In this there is great admonition and that is that on a Monday Allah Ta'ala created food, sustenance, fruits and the things given in charity. Mankind's growth development and livelihood

are closely connected with these and men's selves get joy from them.

- (2) In the word Rabi' from the point of view of its etymology, a good indication and a virtuous omen is found. Abu al-Rahman al-Saqli states that for every man his name is a part for him (i.e. his name has effects on his body).
- (3) The reason of Rabi' (i.e. spring) is the most moderate and beautiful of all the seasons. And the Shari'ah of the Noble Prophet (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam) is the most moderate and the easiest among all the Shara'i.
- (4) Allah, the All-Knowing and All-Wise, wanted to bestow eminence on that time in which the Noble Prophet (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam) entered this world. Had he been born in any of the above-mentioned sanctified times, then the illusion may have arisen that the nobility and eminence of the Noble Prophet (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam) are on account of those sanctified times.